

UNITED STATES DISTRICT COURT
SOUTHERN DISTRICT OF OHIO

SPENCER NEAL,)	CASE NO.:
)	
Plaintiff,)	<u>CIVIL RIGHTS</u>
)	
vs.)	<u>COMPLAINT FOR INJUNCTIVE</u>
)	<u>RELIEF AND DAMAGES:</u>
J A G BLACK GOLD MANAGEMENT)	
COMPANY,)	<u>1ST CAUSE OF ACTION:</u> For Denial of
d/b/a THE 23 MART,)	Access by a Public Accommodation in
d/b/a PV GOLD PARTNERSHIP,)	Violation of the Americans with Disability
)	Act of 1990 ("Title III" and "ADA"),
Defendant.)	42 U.S.C. §§ 12181 <i>et seq.</i>

Plaintiff SPENCER NEAL Complains of Defendant J A G BLACK GOLD
MANAGEMENT COMPANY, doing business as THE 23 MART, also doing business as PV
GOLD PARTNERSHIP, and alleges as follows:

INTRODUCTION:

1. This is a civil rights action for discrimination against persons with physical disabilities, of which plaintiff NEAL is a member of, for failure to remove architectural barriers structural in nature at Defendant's property, a place of public accommodation, thereby discriminatorily denying plaintiff access to, the full and equal enjoyment of, opportunity to participate in, and benefit from, the goods, facilities, services, and accommodations thereof. NEAL seeks injunctive relief pursuant to the Americans with Disability Act of 1990 ("title III" AND "ADA"), *et sec.*

2. NEAL is a person with physical disabilities who, on or about November 16, 2019 and November 17, 2019, was an invitee, guest, patron, or customer at Defendant's property,

which houses a gas station and retail store, THE 23 MART, located at 6301 South High Street, Shadeville, Ohio 43137. At said time and place, Defendant failed to provide proper legal access to the property, which is a public accommodation and/or public facility. The denial of access was in violation of federal legal requirements, and NEAL suffered violations of his civil rights to full and equal access and was physically injured, embarrassed and humiliated.

JURISDICTION AND VENUE:

3. **Jurisdiction:** This Court has jurisdiction of this action pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §1331 for violations of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. §12101, et seq.

4. **Venue:** Venue is proper in this court pursuant to 28 U.S.C. §1391(b) and is founded on the facts that the real property which is the subject of this action is located in this district, in the City of Columbus, County of Franklin, State of Ohio and that NEAL's causes of action arose in this district.

PARTIES:

5. NEAL is a "physically handicapped person," a "physically disabled person," and a "person with physical disabilities." (Hereinafter the terms "physically disabled," "physically handicapped" and "person with physical disabilities" are used interchangeably, as these words have similar or identical common usage and legal meaning.) NEAL is a "person with physical disabilities," as defined by all applicable United States laws. NEAL requires the use of a wheelchair to travel about in public. Consequently, NEAL is a member of that portion of the public whose rights are protected.

6. Defendant J A G BLACK GOLD MANAGEMENT COMPANY, doing business as THE 23 MART, also doing business as PV GOLD PARTNERSHIP, an Ohio Corporation,

(alternatively referred to as “Defendant”) is the owner and operator, lessor and/or lessee, or agent of the owner, lessor and/or lessee, franchisor and/or franchisee, of the building and/or buildings which constitute a public facility in and of itself, occupied by THE 23 MART, located at 6301 South High Street, Shadeville, Ohio 43137 (hereinafter “the business”), and subject to the requirements of the Americans with Disability Act of 1990 (“TITLE III” AND “ADA”), 42. U.S.C. §§ 12181 *et seq.*, and to all other legal requirements referred to in this complaint.

7. The business is open to the general public and conducts business therein. The business operating on said premises is a public accommodation.

8. At all times relevant to this complaint, Defendant is the landlord/lessor, tenant/lessee and the owner and operator of the business. As such, Defendant is jointly and severally responsible to identify and remove architectural barriers pursuant to Code of Federal Regulations section 36.201(b), which states in pertinent part:

§ 36.201 General

(b) Landlord and tenant responsibilities. Both the landlord who owns the building that houses a place of public accommodation and the tenant who owns or operates the place of public accommodation are public accommodations subject to the requirements of this part. As between the parties, allocation of responsibility for complying with the obligations of this part may be determined by lease or other contract.

CFR §36.201(b)

9. NEAL does not know the true names of Defendant, their business capacities, their ownership connection to the property and business, nor their relative responsibilities in causing the access violations herein complained of. NEAL is informed and believes that the

Defendant herein is a public accommodation, and is the agent, ostensible agent, master, servant, employer, employee, representative, franchisor, franchisee, partner, and associate, or such similar capacity, of each of the other Defendants, if any, and was at all times acting and performing, or failing to act or perform, within the course and scope of his, her or its authority as agent, ostensible agent, master, servant, employer, employee, representative, franchiser, franchisee, partner, and associate, or such similar capacity, and with the authorization, consent, permission or ratification of each of the other Defendants, and is responsible in some manner for the acts and omissions of the other Defendants in legally causing the violations and damages complained of herein, and have approved or ratified each of the acts or omissions of each other defendant, as herein described. NEAL may seek leave to amend when the true names, capacities, connections, and responsibilities of Defendant are ascertained.

PRELIMINARY FACTUAL ALLEGATIONS:

10. Defendant is the entity that is a public accommodation that owns, leases (or leases to), or operates the business. The business and each of its facilities are places “of public accommodation” subject to the requirements of the Americans with Disability Act of 1990 (“TITLE III” AND “ADA”), 42. U.S.C. §§ 12181 *et seq.* On information and belief, said facility has undergone “alterations, structural repairs and additions,” each of which has subjected the business to handicapped access requirements.

11. NEAL is a person with a disability. NEAL is a “physically disabled person,” as defined by all applicable United States laws. NEAL is paralyzed as a result of spina bifida and requires the use of a wheelchair for mobility and to travel in public.

12. At all times referred to herein and continuing to the present time, Defendant

advertised, publicized and held out the business as being handicapped accessible and handicapped usable.

13. On or about November 16, 2019 and November 17, 2019, NEAL was an invitee and guest at the business, arriving for purposes of purchasing fuel, food and drink.

14. Upon his arrival, during his patronizing of the public accommodation, and upon his exit of the facility, NEAL personally encountered architectural barriers which denied him the full and equal access to the property.

15. Therefore, at said time and place, NEAL, a person with a disability, encountered the following inaccessible elements of the business which constituted architectural barriers and a denial of the proper and legally required access to a public accommodation to persons with physical disabilities. By way of example and not as an exhaustive inventory of Defendant's violations, the following barriers to access were personally encountered by NEAL:

- a. In the parking area, there are no accessible parking stalls in violation of 2010 ADAS Section: 208.2 and 1991 ADAS Section: 4.1.2(5)(a).
- b. In the parking area, there are no van accessible parking stalls in violation of 2010 ADAS Section: 208.2, 208.2.4.
- c. In the parking area, the accessible route is constructed such that a park vehicle can obstruct the minimum 36 inch width in violation of 2010 ADAS Section: 502.7 and 1991 ADAS Section: 4.6.3.
- d. At the fueling area, the card reader, controls and key pads are located greater than 54 inches above the accessible level area for each pump in violation of 2010 ADAS Section: 308.3.2 Exception 2.
- e. At the entrance, there is no ISA at this entrance in violation of 2010 ADAS Section: 216.6 and 1991 ADAS Section: 4.1.2(7)(c).

- f. At the entrance, the doormat is not secured in place at the entry door in violation of 2010 ADAS Section: 302.2 and 1991 ADAS Section: 4.5.3.
- g. At the interior accessible route, the route of travel throughout the store does not provide a minimum width of 36 inches in aisles and around merchandise in violation of 2010 ADAS Section: 403.5.1 and 1991 ADAS Section: 4.3.3.
- h. At the interior accessible route, the floormats are not secured in place throughout the store in violation of 2010 ADAS Section: 302.2 and 1991 ADAS Section: 4.5.3.
- i. At the sales counter, carious merchandise, dispensers and vending is not accessible because there is not adequate clear floor space for either a forward or side approach in violation of 2010 ADAS Section: 305.3 and 1991 ADAS Section: 4.2.4.1.
- j. At the sales counter, the drinks dispensers are not accessible because they are located over an obstruction greater than 34 inches tall in violation of 2010 ADAS Section: 308.3.2 and 1991 ADAS Section: 4.2.6.
- k. At the sales counter, all of the fountain machine and condiments are not accessible because there is not adequate clear floor space for an approach in violation of 2010 ADAS Section: 305.3 and 1991 ADAS Section: 4.2.4.1.
- l. At the sales counter, the fountain machine controls are too high and out of the maximum reach range for a side approach in violation of 2010 ADAS Section: 308.3.2.
- m. At the sales counter, the transaction counter is too high in violation of 2010 ADAS Section: 904.4.2, 904.4.1 and 1991 ADAS Section: 7.2(1).
- n. At the restroom, the maneuvering space on the pull side of the door or gate does not adequately extend beyond the latch side of the door in violation of 2010 ADAS Section: 404.2.4.1 and 1991 ADAS Section: 4.13.6.
- o. At the restroom, the maneuvering clearance at the door is obstructed in violation of 2010 ADAS Section: 404.2.4.1 and 1991 ADAS Section: 4.13.6.

- p. At the restroom, a compliant room identification sign is missing on the strike side of the door in violation of 2010 ADAS Section: 216.2 and 1991 ADAS Section: 4.30.6.
- q. In the restroom, the restroom is missing the International Symbol of Accessibility (ISA) in violation of 2010 ADAS Section: 216.8 and 1991 ADAS Section: 4.1.3(1).
- r. In the restroom, the restroom lacks the clear floor and/or turning space within the restroom in violation of 2010 ADAS Section: 603.2.1 and 1991 ADAS Section: 4.22.3.
- s. In the restroom, the lavatory projects into the clear floor space required for the toilet in violation of 2010 ADAS Section: 604.3.2.
- t. In the restroom, the rear grab bar is missing in violation of 2010 ADAS Section: 609.4 and 1991 ADAS Section: 4.16.4.
- u. In the restroom, the side grab bar is missing in violation of 2010 ADAS Section: 609.4 and 1991 ADAS Section: 4.16.4.
- v. In the restroom, the required 56 inches by 60 inches clear floor space for the water closet has been obstructed by the trash can in violation of 2010 ADAS Section: 604.3.1 and 1991 ADAS Section: 4.16.2.
- w. In the restroom, the paper towel dispenser's operation mechanism is too high off the floor in violation of 2010 ADAS Section: 308.2.1.
- x. In the restroom, the mirror is mounted too high in violation of 2010 ADAS Section: 603.3.
- y. In the restroom, compliant knee space has not been provided under the lavatory in violation of 2010 ADAS Section: 306.3.1.

16. The discriminatory violations described in ¶ 15 are not an exclusive list of the Defendant's violations. NEAL requires the inspection of the Defendant's place of public

accommodation in order to photograph and measure all of the discriminatory acts violating the Americans with Disability Act of 1990 (“title III” AND “ADA”), 42. U.S.C. §§ 12181 *et seq.*

17. At all times stated herein, the existence of architectural barriers at Defendant’s place of public accommodation evidenced “actual notice” of Defendant’s intent not to comply with the Americans with Disability Act of 1990 (“title III” and “ADA”), 42. U.S.C. §§ 12181 *et seq.*, either then, now or in the future.

18. As a legal result of Defendant’s failure to act as a reasonable and prudent public accommodation in identifying, removing or creating architectural barriers, policies, practices and procedures that denied access to NEAL and other persons with disabilities, NEAL suffered damages as alleged herein.

19. As a further legal result of the actions and failure to act of Defendant, and as a legal result of the failure to provide proper handicapped-accessible public facilities as set forth herein, NEAL was denied his civil rights to full and equal access to public facilities. NEAL suffered a loss of his civil rights and his rights as a person with physical disabilities to full and equal access to public facilities, and further suffered from physical injury, shame, humiliation, embarrassment, anger, chagrin, disappointment and worry, expectedly and naturally associated with a person with physical disabilities being denied access, all to his damages as prayed hereinafter in an amount within the jurisdiction of this court.

20. NEAL is “physically handicapped,” “physically disabled,” or a “person with physical disabilities” who was denied his rights to equal access to a public facility by Defendant. Defendant maintained a public establishment without access for persons with physical disabilities as stated herein, and continues as of the date of filing this complaint to deny equal

access to NEAL and other persons with physical disabilities in these and other ways.

21. On information and belief, construction alterations carried out by Defendant have triggered access requirements under Americans with Disability Act of 1990 (“TITLE III” AND “ADA”), 42. U.S.C. §§ 12181 *et seq.*

22. NEAL, as described herein below, seeks injunctive relief to require the business to be made accessible to meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act, so long as Defendant operates and/or leases the business as a public facility.

23. On information and belief, Defendant has been negligent in its affirmative duty to identify the architectural barriers complained of herein and negligent in the removal of some or all of said barriers.

24. Because of Defendant’s violations, NEAL and other persons with physical disabilities are unable to use public facilities such as those owned and operated by Defendant on a “full and equal” basis unless such facility is in compliance with the provisions of the Americans with Disabilities Act. NEAL seeks an order from this court compelling Defendant to make the business accessible to persons with disabilities.

25. NEAL is informed and believes and therefore alleges that Defendant caused the subject property to be constructed, altered and maintained in such a manner that persons with physical disabilities were denied full and equal access to, within and throughout said facility of the business and were denied full and equal use of said public facility. Further, on information and belief, Defendant has continued to maintain and operate said facility in such conditions up to the present time, despite actual and constructive notice to such Defendant that the configuration of the establishment and/or its building(s) is in violation of the civil rights of persons with

physical disabilities, such as NEAL and the disability community. Such construction, modification, ownership, operation, maintenance and practices of such public facilities are in violation of law as stated in the Americans with Disability Act of 1990 (“TITLE III” AND “ADA”), 42. U.S.C. §§ 12181 *et seq.*

26. On personal knowledge, information and belief, the basis of Defendant’s actual and constructive notice that the physical configuration of the facilities including, but not limited to, architectural barriers constituting the business was in violation of the civil rights of persons with physical disabilities, such as NEAL, includes, but is not limited to, communications with invitees and guests, owners of other establishments and businesses, notices Defendant obtained from governmental agencies upon modification, improvement, or substantial repair of the subject premises and other properties owned by the Defendant, newspaper articles and trade publications regarding the Americans with Disabilities Act and other access laws, public service announcements, and other similar information. Defendant’s failure, under state and federal law, to make the establishment accessible is further evidence of Defendant’s conscious disregard for the rights of NEAL and other similarly situated persons with disabilities. The scope and means of the knowledge of Defendant are within Defendant’s exclusive control and cannot be ascertained except through discovery. Despite being informed of such effect on NEAL and other persons with physical disabilities due to the lack of accessible facilities, Defendant knowingly and willfully refused to take any steps to rectify the situation and to provide full and equal access for NEAL and other persons with physical disabilities to the establishment. Said Defendant has continued such practices, in conscious disregard for the rights of NEAL and other persons with physical disabilities, up to the date of filing of this complaint, and continuing thereon.

27. NEAL will return to THE 23 MART to purchase fuel, food and drink, if the business made fully accessible to a disabled person in a wheelchair, and to also avail himself of the business' services. Furthermore, Mr. NEAL intends to return to the business as an ADA tester on an annual basis, beginning in 2020, in order to ascertain whether Defendant removed the barriers to access which are the subject of this litigation.

I. FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION FOR DENIAL OF ACCESS BY A PUBLIC ACCOMMODATION IN VIOLATION OF THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT OF 1990 (42 U.S.C. §12101, *et seq.*)

33. NEAL pleads and incorporate by reference, as if fully set forth again herein, the allegations contained in paragraphs 1 through 27 of this complaint.

34. Pursuant to law, in 1990, the United States Congress made findings per 42 U.S.C. §12101 regarding persons with physical disabilities, finding that laws were needed to more fully protect:

some 43 million Americans with one or more physical or mental disabilities; [that] historically society has tended to isolate and segregate individuals with disabilities; [that] such forms of discrimination against individuals with disabilities continue to be a serious and pervasive social problem; [that] the nation's proper goals regarding individuals with disabilities are to assure equality of opportunity, full participation, independent living and economic self-sufficiency for such individuals; [and that] the continuing existence of unfair and unnecessary discrimination and prejudice denies people with disabilities the opportunity to compete on an equal basis and to pursue those opportunities for which our free society is justifiably famous.

35. Congress stated as its purpose in passing the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990 (42 U.S.C. §12102):

It is the purpose of this act (1) to provide a clear and comprehensive national mandate for the elimination of discrimination against individuals with disabilities; (2) to provide

clear, strong, consistent, enforceable standards addressing discrimination against individuals with disabilities; (3) to ensure that the Federal government plays a central role in enforcing the standards established in this act on behalf of individuals with disabilities; and (4) to invoke the sweep of Congressional authority, including the power to enforce the 14th Amendment and to regulate commerce, in order to address the major areas of discrimination faced day to day by people with disabilities.

36. As part of the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, (hereinafter the “ADA”), Congress passed “Title III - Public Accommodations and Services Operated by Private Entities” (Section 301 42 U.S.C. §12181, *et seq.*). Among the public accommodations identified for purposes of this title was:

(7) PUBLIC ACCOMMODATION - The following private entities are considered public accommodations for purposes of this title, if the operations of such entities affect commerce -

(B) *** or other establishment serving food or drink;

(F) ***gas station ***.

42 U.S.C. §12181(7)(B)(F).

37. Pursuant to §302, 42 U.S.C. §12182, “No individual shall be discriminated against on the basis of disability in the full and equal enjoyment of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations of any place of public accommodation by any person who owns, leases, or leases to, or operates a place of public accommodation.”

38. The specific prohibitions against discrimination set forth in §302(b)(2)(a), 42 U.S.C. §12182(b)(2)(a) are:

(i) the imposition or application of eligibility criteria that screen out or tend to screen out an individual with a disability or any class of individuals with disabilities from fully and equally enjoying any goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations, unless such criteria can be shown to be

necessary for the provision of the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations being offered;

(ii) a failure to make reasonable modifications in policies, practices, or procedures, when such modifications are necessary to afford such goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages or accommodations to individuals with disabilities, unless the entity can demonstrate that making such modifications would fundamentally alter the nature of such goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages, or accommodations;

(iii) a failure to take such steps as may be necessary to ensure that no individual with a disability is excluded, denied services, segregated or otherwise treated differently than other individuals because of the absence of auxiliary aids and services, unless the entity can demonstrate that taking such steps would fundamentally alter the nature of the good, service, facility, privilege, advantage, or accommodation being offered or would result in an undue burden;

(iv) a failure to remove architectural barriers, and communication barriers that are structural in nature, in existing facilities . . . where such removal is readily achievable; and

(v) where an entity can demonstrate that the removal of a barrier under clause (iv) is not readily achievable, a failure to make such goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages or accommodations available through alternative methods if such methods are readily achievable.

The acts of Defendant set forth herein were a violation of NEAL's rights under the ADA, 42.

U.S.C. §§ 12181 *et seq.*

39. The removal of the barriers complained of by NEAL as hereinabove alleged was at all times after January 26, 1992 "readily achievable" as to the business pursuant to 42 U.S.C. §12182 (b)(2)(A)(i)-(iv). On information and belief, if the removal of all the barriers complained of herein together was not "readily achievable," the removal of each individual barrier complained of herein was "readily achievable." On information and belief, Defendant's

failure to remove said barriers was likewise due to discriminatory practices, procedures and eligibility criteria, as defined by §302(b)(2)(a)(i)-(iii); 42 U.S.C. §12182 (b)(2)(A)(i).

40. Per §301(9), 42 U.S.C. §12181 (9), the term “readily achievable” means “easily accomplishable and able to be carried out without much difficulty or expense.” The statute defines relative “expense” in part in relation to the total financial resources of the entities involved. NEAL alleges that properly repairing, modifying, or altering each of the items that plaintiff complains of herein were and are “readily achievable” by the Defendant under the standards set forth under §301(9) of the Americans with Disabilities Act. Further, if it was not “readily achievable” for Defendant to remove each of such barriers, Defendant has failed to make the required services available through alternative methods which were readily achievable.

41. On information and belief, construction work on, and modifications of, the business occurred after the compliance date for the Americans with Disabilities Act, January 26, 1992, independently triggering access requirements under Title III of the ADA.

42. Pursuant to the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, 42 U.S.C. §12188, *et seq.*, §308, NEAL is entitled to the remedies and procedures set forth in §204(a) of the Civil Rights Act of 1964, 42 U.S.C. 2000(a)-3(a), as plaintiff is being subjected to discrimination on the basis of disability in violation of this title or have reasonable grounds for believing that he is about to be subjected to discrimination in violation of §302. NEAL cannot return to or make use of the public facilities complained of herein so long as the premises and Defendant’s policies bar full and equal use by persons with physical disabilities.

43. Per §308(a)(1) (42 U.S.C. 12188), “Nothing in this section shall require a person with a disability to engage in a futile gesture if such person has actual notice that a person or

organization covered by this title does not intend to comply with its provisions.” Pursuant to this last section, NEAL has not returned to Defendant’s premises since on or about November 16, 2019 and November 17, 2019, but on information and belief, alleges that Defendant has continued to violate the law and deny the rights of plaintiff and of other persons with physical disabilities to access this public accommodation. Pursuant to §308(a)(2), “In cases of violations of §302(b)(2)(A)(iv) . . . injunctive relief shall include an order to alter facilities to make such facilities readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities to the extent required by this title.”

44. NEAL seeks relief pursuant to remedies set forth in §204(a) of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 (42 U.S.C. 2000(a)-3(a)), and pursuant to federal regulations adopted to implement the Americans with Disabilities Act of 1990, including but not limited to an order granting injunctive relief and attorneys’ fees. NEAL will seek attorneys’ fees conditioned upon being deemed to be the prevailing party.

Wherefore, plaintiff prays for relief as hereinafter stated.

PRAYER:

Wherefore, NEAL prays that this court grant relief and damages as follows:

I. PRAYER FOR FIRST CAUSE OF ACTION FOR DENIAL OF ACCESS BY A PUBLIC ACCOMMODATION IN VIOLATION OF THE AMERICANS WITH DISABILITIES ACT OF 1990 (42 U.S.C. §1 2101, et seq.)

1. For injunctive relief, compelling Defendant to make the business readily accessible to and usable by individuals with disabilities; and to make reasonable modifications in policies, practice, eligibility criteria and procedures so as to afford full access to the goods, services, facilities, privileges, advantages and accommodations being offered.

2. For attorneys' fees, litigation expenses and costs of suit, if NEAL is deemed the prevailing party; and
3. For such other and further relief as the court may deem proper.

Respectfully submitted,

BLAKEMORE, MEEKER & BOWLER CO., L.P.A.

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